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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the Taiwanese people's attitudes toward the issue of requiring English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction at the elementary school level in Taiwan. Taiwanese students (n=45) at Indiana University, Bloomington were randomly selected as subjects from a Chinese student association directory. They were 21-43 years old, from 21 departments, and educated in Taiwanese schools until at least high school. Subjects were administered an attitude survey, and 20 were also interviewed either briefly or extensively by telephone. Results indicate that the subjects show a slight tendency toward the requirement of ESL instruction in elementary school, although interviewees expressed more negative opinions. Most subjects believed the English is an international language, one which can be used most broadly by the Taiwanese. In addition, most respondents felt the first step in implementing ESL instruction at the elementary level is to upgrade teacher training and instructional material development. The survey instrument and response summary are appended. Contains 11 references. (MSE)

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Taiwanese People's Attitudes toward Requiring EFL Course at Elementary Schools: The Opinions of the Taiwanese Students at Indiana University, Bloomington

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Foreign language (FL) has been an important issue in modern countries' language planning. As Garcia (1991) points out: "Proficiency in a second or even a third language" is no longer viewed as a luxury, but rather a necessity for thriving in our 20-century world (p.3). For example, the study of FL has become a national priority in the United States. In 1979, the President's Commission on Foreign languages and International Studies submitted 11 recommendations to the President for promoting foreign languages and international studies into the nation's schools. Besides the United States, Japan, Korea, Denmark and many other developed countries have implemented FL education for a long time. Laitin (1977) suggests that language planning entails planning a change in world view. Eastman (1983) claims that

> Human thought is thinkable and expressible in any and all languages equally. Insofar as education is concerned with teaching people various ways to express thought, the language they are educated in ought to be the one most in harmony with the goals of the larger society (p.84).

When a country tries to choose a foreign language to teach its children, "a language associated with a group that people strongly identify with is likely to be more successfully planned" (Eastman 1983, p.75). Eastman suggests that if we want to foster language development in line with planned policy, we need to see that the people the plan involves are appropriately motivated to accept the plan. We need to be sure that they have positive attitudes toward the chosen language. Besides the positive attitude toward the target language, Webber (1979) points out that attitudes toward modernization are as important as attitudes toward language in adopting, accepting and using this language. According to Lamber (1972), if we are to successfully learn a language spoken by a different group, we even have to be willing and able to adopt various other aspects of that group's behavior as well. Our feeling for our own group and our preconceptions of the other group will determine our success in learning the new language. Corson (1989) provides ten points as a rationale for choosing foreign languages for education. The points include: Does the language provide a lingua franca

with neighboring countries? Is the language generally regarded as an international language? Is the language a language of commerce with any of the country's major trading partners? And is the language identified as an official language of wider learning by government?

As for the issue of students' age for foreign language learning, opinions from scholars differ. Stern (1976), like many earlier researchers, concludes that early age school instruction does not itself guarantee success and that it is likely the ability to learn foreign languages improves with age. Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) reports that older learners are better and more efficient in most aspects of FL learning and that any advantages younger children possess can be compensated for by using different teaching approaches with the older students. Corson (1989) suggests that traditional forms of foreign language teaching may be postponed to the post-primary years, although there are several knowledge areas for general language awareness development that are very suitable for introduction in the junior grades. These knowledge areas include the history of languages and the relationships among languages. Nemetz Robinson (1985) suggests that for the cultural studies part of FL teaching, the early years of secondary schooling may be the best time for broadening student understanding and lessening cultural insularity. However, Garcia (1991) claims that "psychologists, linguists, and educators agree that ages 4 to 12 constitute the prime time for foreign language instruction" (p.2). He finds that beyond the age of 10 or 11, children appear to be less open to change.

Denmark has become famous for its foreign language planning in education. After World War II, Denmark changed from an agricultural country to an industrial country. It became less restricted to local cultures and more open to the rest of the world, especially the English-speaking part of it (Risager, 1987). With the 1958 Primary School Act, modern languages were introduced to the primary schools for the first time as compulsory subjects. For all children, English was made mandatory in the 6th year of school. Since 1975, English was required from the 5th year of elementary school. In

addition, since the Danish higher education system is characterized by a growing internationalization (Risager, 1987), the experiences at the intermediate and advanced levels are spreading to the elementary level.

After War World II, Taiwan, like Denmark, gradually changed from an agricultural country to an industrial and commercial country. Because of commercial, educational and industrial goals, Taiwan became very open to the world. As a result, the need for foreign language education became an important issue in the development of Taiwan. As a result, English has been the only required foreign language from the first year of high schools through the freshman year of college for more than twenty years. The reasons for English chosen as the only required foreign language in education are: (1) after World War II, the Taiwanese government's foreign relations are closer to those English-speaking countries: e.g. the United Stated; (2) at the time of policy making, English-speaking countries were posited as leaders in political, technological, scientific and academic development, e.g. England and America.

During the last ten years, there has been a tendency that more and more elementary school students in Taiwan go to expensive private children's English centers to learn English after school. As a result, more and more private children's English centers are founded. Because more and more children are learning English at private English centers, many politicians and parents have claimed that English should be taught as a required course at public elementary schools.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Taiwanese people's attitudes toward the issue of requiring English as FL course at elementary schools in Taiwan. The study focuses on the Taiwanese people at Indiana University in the United States. By using questionnaire and interview survey methods, this study hopes to present the opinions of overseas Taiwanese students in Bloomington, Indiana.

Method

Subject

Forty-five Taiwanese students at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, U.S.A. participated in this study. The researcher randomly selected these subjects according to the names on the IU Chinese Student Association Telephone Directory. Their ages ranged from 21 to 43 years old: 18 people (40%) from 21-25 years old, 18 people (40%) from 26-30 years old, 7 people (16%) from 31-40 years old, and 2 people (4%) above 40 years old. They were from 21 departments. Among them, 30 people (67%) were female and 15 (33%) were male. The rate was in accordance with the Taiwanese student population gender rates at Indiana University, Bloomington. All of the participants were educated in Taiwan from elementary school until at least high school. They all learned English as a FL in Taiwan during their high school to at least freshman years. The subjects learned English at different places around Taiwan: Taipei, Taoyuan, Chungli, Hsinchu, Taichung, Changhua, Yun-Lin, Touliu, Chia-I, Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Ping-Tung. These places are distributed from the northern part of Taiwan to the southern part. None of these subjects has been abroad for more than 3 years.

Materials

This study used two types of material to do the investigation: Likert-scale questionnaire (Appendix I) and interview. The Likert-scale questionnaire developed by Huang (1994) has the reliability of 0.92. It was examined by an attitude scale developing expert, an evaluation and measurement professor at Indiana University. Thus, its face validity is also high. The questions investigated respondents' attitudes toward requiring English as an FL course at elementary schools in Taiwan. Respondents wrote "5" as "strongly agree", "4" as "agree", "3" as "uncertain", "2" as "disagree" and "1" as "strongly disagree". One example question was: "It's useless for elementary school students to

learn English." The other type of survey used in this study was interviews. The questions were designed to "gather speech data in naturalistic settings" (Eastmen, 1983, p.199). Thus, the questions were expressed informally without jargon. One example question was: "In your opinion, why on earth do you agree with the idea of requiring English as a FL course at elementary schools in Taiwan? Why?"

Procedure

The researcher gave out the questionnaires to the subjects personally with the help of one of her Taiwanese friends on a weekend. During the weekend, subjects as students felt more relaxed and had more time in responding to the questions. The researcher collected questionnaires the day after the questionnaires were passed out. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher conducted twenty interviews with twenty subjects selected randomly from the original forty-five respondents the day after collecting the completed questionnaires. The researcher conducted the interviews through phone calls. The interviews were done in informal conversations. This was to avoid interviewees' social desirability in answering questions. During interviews, the researcher was very careful not to guide respondents' answers in a certain preferred direction. Her job was only to ask questions and record answers. Because of the informality of the interviews, each interview length was not equal. The interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 2 hours. However, the interviews provide a deeper insight into respondents' opinions and those opinions' background.

Results

After collecting the data, the researcher used a statistic program package, SPSS, to run the means and standard deviations of respondents' numbering responses on each questionnaire item. The total mean of all the questionnaires from all subjects is 3.2597 (Appendix II), which shows a slight tendency toward agreeing to the topic: requiring an English course at elementary schools. According to the results, 10 item means from the 16 items: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 16 are above 3, which means the subjects rate on

these 10 items with more "agree" tendency. One the other hand, subjects rate on the rest of six items: 3, 7, 8, 12, 13, and 14 in a more "disagree" tendency. The interview results from the question: "Do you agree with requiring English as a foreign language course at elementary schools in Taiwan? Why?" are categorized on Table 1.

Table 1

	Number	Percentage	Reasons-number of people
Agree	9	45%	cultivate children's sensibility toward languages-2
			children are better language learners-6
			learn earlier, perform better in the future-4
Disagree	11	55%	too much burden for children-2
			interfere Chinese learning-2
			elected English course will be more attractive-9
			no practical evidence for child be better learner-1
			may ignore original courses-1
			why not other foreign languages?-4

Some subjects hold overlapping reasons for their dis/agreements. This table shows that 6 of the 9 "agree" people believe that children are better language learners than adults. Nine of the eleven subjects who disagree claim that English should be an elected course instead of a required course at elementary schools. Four of the eleven subjects believe other foreign languages should be included in foreign language teaching.

Table 2 shows subjects' reasons for "why is English taught instead of other languages?"

Table 2

Agree	Number	Reason
	8	English is an international language
	1	Learning English is a tendency in Taiwan
English as an elected course	7/9	English is an international language

Eight of the nine "agree" interviewees (89%) claim that English is an international language. The other one of the "agree" interviewees feels that although English is not necessarily an international language, learning English is a tendency in Taiwan. Seven of those nine interviewees (78%) who claim English as an elected course explain the reason of choosing English only as "English is an international language".

Table 3 shows the result of the question: "What will be the first thing policy makers need to do to implement the idea?"

Table 3

First thing should be done	Number	Percentage
Teachers' training & Teaching material development	13	81%
Well-facilitated learning environment, people's reeducation	2	12%
Improve Chinese teaching	1	6%

Among the sixteen respondents who agree that English either should be a required course or an elected course at elementary schools, 13 people (81%) claim that teachers' training and teaching material development are both the most important things to do. They believe that teachers need to motivate children's language learning interests. The teaching material needs to be colorful, to motivate children's language learning interests. The government needs to put much effort and money in teachers' training and material development. Two people (12%) believe that creating a constant well-facilitated learning environment and re-educating community people are the two things that need to be done first. These respondents believe that community people need to be taught that foreign

language learning is only a skill development. People should not push children too much. In addition, one of these two respondents suggests that Taiwanese community people should not promote learning English but also learning good habits and good thinking styles from English-speaking countries. The remaining one "agree-attitude" respondent (6%) claims that the children should be taught English only if their Chinese ability is good enough to maintain their native language. This is to ensure that children will not mix up Chinese and English learning.

Table 4 shows the results of question 4 :" Do you worry that children will become acculturated by English-speaking countries?"

Table 4

Opinion	Number	Percentage
There should not be any acculturation	10	50%
Don't worry even there is acculturation	9	45%
There is nothing we can do about acculturation	1	5%

Nineteen people out of twenty interviewees (95%) show no worries about children's acculturation to English-speaking countries. Ten of these 19 respondents believe there should not be any acculturation because learning a foreign language is only like learning a new skill. In addition, the teacher can have control of the whole situation. Nine of these 19 respondents think that even there might be some degree of acculturation, they won't worry about that. They believe that this can broaden children's world view by opening their eyes to other perspectives and by making them appreciate other culture types. Only one of these twenty respondents worries that children may be acculturated if they really get involved in the learning process. "However, there is nothing we can do with it!" this respondent said, "we can not expect to have both advantages in one hand!"

Conclusions and Suggestions

From the results above, this study draws the following conclusions:

First, from the grand mean -- 3.2597 -- of the questionnaire responses, the subjects appear to slightly prefer the idea of requiring English as an foreign language course at elementary schools.. From interviews, there is slightly more people tend to disagree with this idea (Agree:Disagree = 9:11). However, among those "disagree" subjects, 80% of them claim that English had better be an elected course instead of a required course at elementary schools. Two of them even suggest that the term "elective" will be better accepted. "I am sure the final result will be," said one of the two respondents, "parents will ask their children to select English as their first foreign language if English is not a required course." "People will welcome English be taught at elementary schools if it is regulated as an elected course instead of required course", said another subject. This implies that Taiwanese people may identify English as their first foreign language to learn. However, the process of activating the English language education needs to be under a free choice condition instead of restricted requirement.

Second, from the responses for the second question, we see very clearly that most of the subjects believe "English is an international language." Most subjects feel English is the most broadly used language in the world. "It is very useful in communicating to international friends," said a subject, "even when you are traveling abroad, you can use English to survive." "English is the most useful language used in trading, in getting more knowledge," said another subject, "Most of the foreign books are written in English today in Taiwan." English has been identified as an international language which can be used most broadly for most of Taiwanese students.

Third, most respondents believe that the first thing the government needs to do to implement English teaching at elementary schools in Taiwan is to emphasize on teachers' training and teaching material development. None of these respondents mentions persuading parents or any groups of people to implement English as an FL course at elementary schools. It seems that every subject feels confident that if the government wants to implement this idea, there won't be problems in the public's agreement. The

first thing most of Taiwanese people think of will be the quality of teachers and teaching material. One of the respondents even suggests: "I believe English teachers at elementary schools need to have higher education level. They should at least own master's degrees. Because English teaching at elementary schools are much more important than at high schools or colleges." What matters to Taiwanese people is not the decision made by government; instead, it is the way of how to improve teaching results. Fourth, almost all the respondents have no worries about children's acculturation in learning English. They believe learning English is similar to learning playing any musical instruments. Children will master the skill without being assimilated. Even if there is any acculturation happening, almost all respondents feel optimistic and glad to see the acculturation happen. They believe that slight acculturation is a positive phenomena to broaden children's viewpoints toward the world. "If children know more about other countries' culture, they will know how to appreciate other living styles and broaden their world view," said a subject, "I believe this is a very positive and important concept that people should have since they are children." "I believe English has become an international language which is not restricted to any country or culture," said another respondent, "thus, where comes the acculturation problem?" From this, we can see that Taiwanese people are eager to become internationalized instead of constraining themselves in their mono-culture. Moreover, English has been identified as an international language rather being the language representing certain countries or certain culture.

From the results, people tend to agree with teaching English as a foreign language at elementary schools in Taiwan under an elective course condition. People identify English as an international language and emphasize that the education policy maker should improve teachers' training and teaching material to facilitate the implementation of English education at elementary schools. However, this study is only a pilot study. Its study range is limited to the Taiwanese students at Indiana University, Bloomington.

The results of this study can only be a tentative representative of the viewpoints of the Taiwanese students at Indiana University. The researcher strongly suggests that further study needs to be done to the people in Taiwan to investigate the general viewpoint of Taiwanese people on this issue.

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APPENDIX I

Requiring EFL at Elementary Schools in Taiwan

Use the following response categories to show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Please mark every item. (EFL = English as Foreign Language)

SA= Strongly agree
A = Agree
U = Uncertain
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly disagree

_____ 1. English is an international language; thus, elementary school students need to learn it.
_____ 2. People should learn English as early as possible.
_____ 3. Learning English and Mandarin at the same time is a big burden for elementary school students.
_____ 4. It's useless for elementary school students to learn English.
_____ 5. I would like to require my children to learn English in elementary school.
_____ 6. I prefer for my child to learn English in high school better than in elementary school.
_____ 7. Not until children have the motivation in learning should they learn English.
_____ 8. Compulsory English learning will kill children's language learning motivation.
_____ 9. Requirement activity is necessary for children to learn EFL.
_____ 10. The idea of requiring EFL in elementary school is good.
_____ 11. The idea of requiring EFL in elementary school is bad.
_____ 12. I don't like English be taught as a required course at elementary schools.
_____ 13. I feel uncomfortable with the idea of "English as requirement".
_____ 14. Only when EFL becomes a required course in elementary school can it be taught functionally in high school.
_____ 15. Requiring EFL learning in elementary school provides children better opportunities to master English .
_____ 16. Requiring EFL at elementary schools will benefit Taiwanese students greatly.

Age:_____ Gender:_____

Major:_____

Place you live in Taiwan:_____

Suggestions for EFL in Taiwan?(optional)_____

THANX*!!*

APPENDIX II

	MEAN	STD DEV	CASES
Item 1	3.3556	1.2820	45.0
Item2	3.5778	1.0764	45.0
Item3	2.9111	1.1446	45.0
Item4	3.9111	.7926	45.0
Item5	3.4222	1.1964	45.0
Item6	3.3778	1.1340	45.0
Item7	2.7556	1.2276	45.0
Item8	2.9111	1.0622	45.0
Item9	3.6222	.9837	45.0
Item10	3.4000	.9863	45.0
Item11	3.6667	.8790	45.0
Item12	2.7556	1.2820	45.0
Item13	2.8444	1.1862	45.0
Item14	2.6889	.9960	45.0
Item15	3.5333	.9677	45.0
Item16	3.4222	1.0973	45.0

GRAND MEAN= 3.2597